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CSCE Digest

Vol. 21, No. 4

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

April 1998

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photo: E. Wayne Merry

A torchlight rally in support of then-Acting Prime Minister Robert Kocharian on the eve of Armenia's extraordinary presidential election runoff March 30

Robert Kocharian Elected President of Armenia Amid Controversy

by Michael Ochs

On March 30, Armenians went to the polls to choose a president in a runoff between Robert Kocharian—Armenia's Prime Minister, Acting President and former President of Nagorno-Karabakh—and Karen Demirchian, former Communist Party leader of Armenia. The election followed first round voting on March 16, in which none of the 12 candidates managed to win the necessary 50 percent of the ballot. According to Armenia's Central Election Commission, in the second round, Kocharian won 59.48 percent to Demirchian's 40.52 percent, to become Armenia's second president. Reported turnout was 68.14 percent.

Some candidates in the first round questioned the eligibility of Kocharian—a native of Nagorno-Karabakh, not Armenia—to run, but the Central Election Commission registered his candidacy. The subsequent contest between Kocharian and Demirchian pre-

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Recently Released Commission Publications:

Report on Human Rights and the Process of NATO Enlargement—Hearing, June 1997

The OSCE After The Lisbon Summit—Report, August 1997

Religious Intolerance in Europe Today—Hearing, September 1997

Human Rights and Democratization in Slovakia—Report, September 1997

The 1997 Municipal Elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina—Report, October 1997

Presidential Elections in Montenegro—Report, February 1998

1997 OSCE Meeting on Human Dimension Issues—Report, February 1998

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, by law, monitors and encourages progress in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is made up of nine Senators, nine Representatives, and one official each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce. For more information, please call (202) 225-1901.

Concentration Camp Archives Moved to Prague

by Erika Schlager

In January, representatives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum traveled to Prague to continue discussions on the Museum's interest in material currently held in Czech archives. (Similar discussions are underway between the Museum and numerous European capitals.) Among the materials currently sought by the Museum are copies of the Lety concentration camp archives.

In 1994, Paul J. Polansky, a Czech-American writer, drew international attention to the records of a concentration camp which had been run between 1940-43 in the Czech village of Lety during the Nazi occupation. Roma from throughout Bohemia and Moravia were brought to Lety, which served as a work camp and a point for deportation to death camps, primarily Auschwitz. Polansky came across the archives while doing research in the Czech lands in 1992-93 for a book on an unrelated subject. Sensing the historic importance of these materials, he ultimately brought them to the attention of the Helsinki Commission and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In 1994, then-Helsinki Commission Chairmen Dennis DeConcini and Steny H. Hoyer supported a request by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to obtain copies of these archives and urged the Czech Government, consistent with its OSCE obligations (see sidebar), to preserve and protect the Lety camp site. More recently, current Chairmen Alfonso D'Amato and Christopher H. Smith wrote to Czech Minister Vladimír Mlynar in February. They commended Minister Mlynar for his statements calling for a proper me-

morial to be established at the site of the concentration camp in Lety—a Communist-era pork processing farm currently occupies the site—and they expressed their hopes that efforts to make a complete copy of the Lety archives available to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum might be sped up.

Czech officials have given assurances to the Helsinki Commission that they will cooperate with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in microfilming the Lety archives and, in 1994, the Czech Embassy conveyed the "maximal support" of then-Interior Minister Jan Ruml to commemorate Roma camp sites at both Lety and Hodonin (another war-time Roma concentration camp in the Czech Republic). Thus far, however, the process has moved slowly; after four years, the records have been moved from the regional archives in Trebon to the central archives in Prague (a step completed in January 1998), but no microfilming of them has actually begun. Meanwhile, efforts to bring a criminal case against a surviving Lety camp guard appear to have stalled.

Although the Lety archives were apparently known to some Czechoslovak historians (notably Dr. Ctibor Necas, who has called for the cemetery at Lety to be made into a national historic monument), the significance of these archives does not appear to have been fully or widely appreciated. In fact, these archives may be unique in documenting a part of the Holocaust (known to Roma as the Porrajmos, the Devouring) that, until now, has largely been shrouded in darkness. Although

Roma, like Jews, were targeted by Nazi Germany for total destruction, comparatively little has been written about their war-time experiences.

Even among the Roma, few have given attention to documenting their suffering. This has been explained, by some, as a product of the continuing Roma struggle for survival: who can spend time writing about yesterday's tragedies, when every day is a fight for life? Illustrating this point, one author described the efforts of Emilian Nicholae, a Rom who painstakingly compiled the oral history of Roma Holocaust survivors in his Romanian village—only to have those hand written testimonies destroyed during the anti-Roma pogrom in Romania in 1991. □

"The participating States will strive to preserve and protect those monuments and sites of remembrance, including most notably extermination camps, and the related archives, which are themselves testimonials to tragic experiences in their common past. Such steps need to be taken in order to ensure that those experiences may be remembered, may help to teach present and future generations of these events, and thus ensure that they are never repeated.

"The interpretation of sensitive sites of remembrance can serve as a valuable means of promoting tolerance and understanding among people and will take into account social and cultural diversity."

—OSCE 1991 Cracow Document

The View from Vienna

by Janice Helwig

The OSCE Permanent Council (PC) meets every Thursday in Vienna and can be called into session on emergency or *ad hoc* basis. In March, the PC held in-depth discussions of developments in Kosovo, and heard reports from the heads of OSCE missions in Tajikistan, Albania, Ukraine, and Bosnia, as well as the head of the Central Asia Liaison Office. The Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities came to discuss their latest projects. The PC received the Foreign Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, a special reinforced PC was convened in accordance with the Copenhagen Ministerial decisions to set the date of the next OSCE summit and discuss future work on the Security Model.

Kosovo was a continual focus for the PC during March. As the situation there deteriorated, the PC not only discussed the situation in its weekly meetings, but also convened twice in emergency sessions. The first, on March 11, culminated with a decision calling on Belgrade and the Kosovar Albanians to enter into a meaningful dialogue; supporting a mission by CiO Personal Representative Felipe Gonzalez; authorizing the augmentation of the OSCE mission to Skopje and the OSCE Presence in Albania to monitor the borders with Kosovo; and organizing monitoring missions to Kosovo by the OSCE Embassies in Belgrade. The decision also calls on FRY authorities to halt excessive use of force in Kosovo, allow access to Kosovo for interna-

tional humanitarian organizations, implement the education agreement, and accept the return of the OSCE missions of long duration to Kosovo, Sandzak, and Vojvodina. The second emergency meeting, held on March 26, discussed implementation of the PC decision and the ongoing violence in Kosovo. Chairman-in-Office Polish Foreign Minister Geremek visited Belgrade, Pristina, and Podgorica on March 27 in an effort to press Belgrade to comply with the OSCE demands.

The Head of Mission (HOM) in Tajikistan, Georgian Ambassador Manjavidze told the PC that the mission has received permission from the Tajik Government to open a field office in Khojand. The mission has been focusing its work on strengthening rule of law, laying the groundwork for free and fair elections, and promoting human rights. Dutch Ambassador Everts, head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, reported that political and economic progress in the country since the upheaval last year has been slow but noticeable. Albania's infrastructure is particularly in need of upgrading. HOM Ukraine, American Ambassador Wygant appeared at the PC prior to the Ukrainian elections and gave an update on preparations for them. The new HOM in Bosnia, American Ambassador Barry secured endorsement from the PC for two goals of the mission: the firm date of September 12-13 for the 1998 Bosnian elections, and support for full international supervision of those elections. Barry also announced measures to increase participation of Bosnian nationals in the election effort and highlighted

support for political parties and judicial reform as two coordination tasks for the mission in its effort to augment its human rights activities. The head of the OSCE's Central Asia Liaison Office in Tashkent filled the PC in on its preparations for CiO Geremek's trip to the region in mid-April. The Office also has been supporting implementation of ODIHR's programs in Uzbekistan.

ODIHR Director Swiss Ambassador Stoudmann reported to the PC on a recent assessment trip to the Caucasus region; he led a team made up of representatives from the Council of Europe, UNHCR, the EU Commission, and several NGOs to explore possible areas of assistance in protecting human rights in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Ambassador Stoudmann also summarized the findings of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to Moldova, Ukraine, and Armenia. High Commissioner on National Minorities Max Van der Stoep discussed preparations for his late March trip to Latvia, a successful roundtable in Romania on Hungarian language education, his February trip to Skopje, and a planned roundtable in Kyrgyzstan on inter-ethnic relations.

Bosnian Foreign Minister Prlic stressed Bosnia's desire to become a joint partner with the international community and overcome the obstacles of recovering from the war. Dutch Foreign Minister van Mierlo proposed measures to strengthen cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe. He also renewed the Dutch offer to continue to support the offices of the High

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sented voters with a choice between a young nationalist “outsider” who led Nagorno-Karabakh’s campaign for self-determination and an older, Communist-era leader forced from office in 1988 because of Karabakh, who represented the past and much popular nostalgia for the easier life of a bygone time.

The extraordinary election followed the resignation on February 3 of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, President of Armenia since 1991. Ter-Petrosyan had retained his post in a deeply flawed election in September 1996 which damaged his legitimacy and reputation. His acceptance of the OSCE’s Minsk Group proposals to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, publicly expressed in fall 1997, generated deep divisions within his government. The Defense Minister and Minister of National Security allied with Prime Minister Kocharian against Ter-Petrosyan, whose position enjoyed little or no visible backing among the opposition and society. As his support faded away, Ter-Petrosyan left office, implying that he had been forced to resign and explicitly asserting that “the party of war” had won.

After two flawed elections in 1995 and 1996, the March 1998 vote offered Armenia, under different leadership—with Ter-Petrosyan gone and his party, the Armenian National Movement, in disarray—an opportunity to redeem its image as a democratizing state. Most observers concurred that the campaign was better than in earlier elections: no candidate was excluded from the race, there were no serious impediments to campaigning, and the candidates received their allotted air time. But the preliminary statement of the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission, issued after the first vote and vote count, emphasized violations and specified areas of concern to be addressed before the second round. The Council of Europe and the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, however, gave the March 16 voting good grades and openly disputed the assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR. Armenian-American groups accused the OSCE/ODIHR of anti-Armenian bias, reflecting a purported tendency to pressure Armenia into accepting the OSCE’s allegedly pro-Azerbaijani proposals on Nagorno-Karabakh.

No less controversial was the OSCE/ODIHR verdict on the second round, which went through two stages. An April 1 preliminary statement noted that in some areas the run-off “fell short of” Armenia’s commitment to



photo: E. Wayne Merry

In Yerevan, supporters of nationalist presidential candidate and then-Acting Prime Minister Robert Kocharian await the arrival of their standard-bearer outside the Opera—frequent scene of Armenian political demonstrations.

OSCE standards and cited sufficient indication of voter fraud to require further investigation. Still, the statement concluded, these shortcomings did not call into question the outcome. Again, other international organizations and Armenian-American groups attacked the OSCE/ODIHR assessment as too harsh, while some OSCE/ODIHR staff and observers voiced puzzlement and bitterness over an assessment they thought too positive and not reflective of what they had seen and reported to the ODIHR’s election coordinators.

The two preliminary statements were written by Sam Brown, former head of the U.S. Delegation to OSCE, and head of the ODIHR’s observation mission. By striking contrast, ODIHR’s final report, released in Warsaw on April 10, reversed course, concluding that the election did not meet the OSCE standards “to which Armenia committed itself in the Copenhagen Document of 1990.” Among numerous other problems, the final report noted ballot-stuffing, discrepancies in the vote count, and the presence of unauthorized persons at polling stations. But the report did not explicitly judge whether the violations affected the outcome, leaving it to others to infer whether the results were credible. Karen Demirchian, Kocharian’s defeated opponent, rejected the official tally, but called on his backers to remain calm and refrain from the sort of disturbances that had taken place in September 1996.

Helsinki Commission monitoring of both rounds yielded a mixed picture. The most serious problem observed during first-round voting was disorganization in

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Smith & Wolf Attend De Burght Conference in Moscow

by John Finerty

January 12-14 Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Commissioner Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-VA), Rep. Tony Hall (R-OH), and Librarian of Congress Dr. James Billington visited Russia to participate in the De Burght Conference on the Russian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. The De Burght Conference was initiated by Mr. Ernst van Eeghen of the Netherlands and has been meeting for about ten years. The Moscow meeting was coordinated by a foundation of the Russian Government and Andrei Loginov, Chief of the Department of Internal Policy of the Presidential Administration. Other participants included European specialists in human rights and religious liberty.

Over the three-day conference participants exchanged views on the religion law with Yeltsin administration officials, Metropolitan Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), and Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on Social and Religious Organizations, Viktor Zorkaltsev. The U.S. participants were also invited to a separate meeting with Mikhail Kommissar, Deputy Chief of Presidential Administration.

The delegation also addressed a session of the Chamber for the Social and Religious Organizations of the President's Political Advisory Council. At each meeting, the U.S. participants reiterated their concerns about the 1997 law, urging the Russian government not to embark on a policy of discriminating against religious groups. At the suggestion of the delegation, several conference participants met with human rights activists and members of the clergy opposed to the law.

At the conclusion of the conference, Mr. Smith and Mr. Hall visited a homeless shelter in Moscow operated by former political prisoner Alexander Ogorodnikov. Ogorodnikov had previously operated a soup kitchen at another location, but it was seized by "unknown persons" in an overnight raid last November.

As a follow-up to the De Burght conference, a delegation of Russian officials subsequently visited Washington to continue discussions on the religion law with the Helsinki Commission and other government and non-government representatives. □



photo: E. Wayne Merry

In Moldova, leaders of the secessionist Transdnistria region brief members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observer delegation. OSCE Head of Mission John Evans is second from the right on the dais.

Communists Win Plurality but Not Power in Moldovan Parliamentary Elections

by John Finerty

On March 22, the second multi-party elections since independence were held for Moldova's 101-member Parliament. The results were a rejection of the victors of the 1994 elections, the Agrarian Democrats, who did not attain the four percent threshold required for entry into the new Parliament. The proto-Communist Socialist-Unity bloc, which had taken second in the earlier parliamentary elections, also suffered significant losses.

The first-place winner this year was the Communist Party (which emerged from legal prohibition in 1994) with just over thirty percent of the vote, or forty seats out of 101. However, of fifteen parties in the running, the remaining seats were won by three centrist and center-right parties. Of over sixty independent candidates on the ballots, none broke the four percent threshold.

In a preliminary assessment, the elections were judged "as a whole satisfactory" by the OSCE Observer Team on March 23, while identifying a number of areas in which improvements should be made for future elections. A "major exception" to the generally-positive picture was the situation in the secessionist Transdnistria region "where neither candidates nor voters had even close to adequate conditions for exercising their civil rights." A Helsinki Commission monitor confirmed that buses chartered by the Moldovan Government to transport voters in the Transdnistria region to polling sta-

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photo: E. Wayne Merry

A precinct committee counts votes in the March 30 presidential runoff election in Armenia. OSCE/ODIHR election monitors witnessed blatant and massive ballot fraud in this Yerevan polling station.

small polling stations swamped by large numbers of voters, and the vote count went well in a precinct where numerous violations took place in 1996. But the vote count observed during the second round featured blatant fraud: the ballot box was tampered with during the vote; extra ballots were present in the box in large and obvious packets; the precinct committee made no effort to distinguish valid from improper votes; the precinct committee was in direct contact with Kocharian headquarters throughout the count; and the precinct protocols were falsified to make the numbers add up—in the direct view of the foreign observers. All the falsified votes were for Kocharian, who was openly supported by most members of the precinct committee. At least one-fifth—and probably as many as 50 percent—of the votes counted in this precinct were false. Subsequently, at the district election level, the box containing the ballots' detachable "coupons" (a mechanism designed to prevent fraud) arrived over an hour late with the lid ripped open. Based on these observations, and the accounts of OSCE/ODIHR observers at their debriefing, there is reason to harbor serious doubt about the reliability of the officially-reported results.

International observation of the two-round election has itself been part of the controversy, highlighting differences between OSCE/ODIHR and other monitoring organizations about the conduct of the election and the general level of democratization in Armenia. The discrepancies between the ODIHR's second preliminary

statement and the final report have also raised questions about the ODIHR's appointment of a special representative, Sam Brown, to head the observation mission. The fact remains, however, that the final assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR, which fielded 140 observers during the second round and based its judgement on their reportage, concluded that the March 1998 Armenian presidential election did not meet OSCE standards. Since the 1991 election of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia has not held an election that OSCE/ODIHR observation missions have been able to qualify as free and fair, or that the losers in the contest have accepted as the definitive will of the voters. As before, opposition parties openly voice doubts about the legitimacy of Armenia's president.

Nevertheless, Kocharian is in a much stronger position than his predecessor, as the events of the last two months have thoroughly shaken up Armenia's political constellation. The formerly banned Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks) have returned to the political arena and strongly support Kocharian. Even more important, he has the backing of the power ministries—Defense and National Security—as well as Yerkrapah, an organization of hardened veterans of the Karabakh conflict. Kocharian has also won the endorsement of nationalist and center-left parties, as well as the Communists. Leading the opposition are Karen Demirchian, who has pledged to remain politically engaged, and National Democratic Union leader Vazgen Manukian, whose loss in the September 1996 election now looks more controversial than ever. They are preparing for parliamentary elections, which may take place before the scheduled July 1999 date.

Many heads of state, including President Clinton, sent Robert Kocharian letters of congratulations after the April preliminary statement, before the release of the OSCE's final report. Kocharian was inaugurated on April 9, pledging to pursue economic reform, fight corruption, and continue to defend the right of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. He has explicitly rejected Ter-Petrosyan's stance on the Karabakh issue and the OSCE's proposals. Whether his "hardline" position deadlocks negotiations and makes renewed war more likely, or whether his credibility as a Karabakh defender facilitates a deal remains to be seen.

A Helsinki Commission report on the Armenian presidential election is forthcoming. □

Roma in the Czech Republic: The Path of Martin Luther King or Malcolm X?

By Erika Schlager

Racially Motivated Attacks Continue Unabated

On February 15, in the Czech town of Vrchlabi, a Romani woman named Helena Bihariova was attacked, beaten, and forced into the Elbe river, where she drowned. A Czech reporter who happened to be passing by jumped into the river and tried to save her, but was unable to do so. Although fire fighters summoned to the crime scene were able to save the reporter, who clung to the root of a tree, the Romani woman—the mother of four children—perished.

This was the latest in a long list of racially motivated murders and attacks that have occurred in the Czech Republic since the fall of communism. Last November, for example, Sudanese student Hassan Elamin Aldelradi was killed by a skinhead in Prague. In January, a 48-year-old Romani woman was seriously injured in Krnov when her home was fire bombed. (Local officials in Krnov subsequently declined to participate in a public demonstration against racism.) In early March, two Romani men in Decin were assaulted by a man with a pistol who voiced his dislike for Roma while he held them at gunpoint; police were eventually able to disarm the man. Also in early March, a Congolese doctor was beaten in the town of Prostějov. In late March, skinheads in Trutnov attacked a Jewish couple.

A recent report by the Czech News Agency stated that there are 5,000 active skinheads in the Czech Republic and that attacks on Roma

and other dark-skinned people are increasing. In testimony before the U.N. Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, non-governmental organizations reported that such crimes increased six-fold between 1994 and 1996. Conservative estimates suggest that more than 20 Roma have been victims of racially motivated murders in the Czech Republic since the Velvet Revolution.

“The citizens of Roma descent and language have lived among us for centuries in their own special fashion. Under the Nazi rule, they were physically liquidated, under the Communists insensitively ‘civilized.’ After eight years of democratic government they are fleeing our country to settle abroad, where they hope they won’t be considered a lower race, humiliated, and face threats on their life. This is not just their impression. There have been a number of violent assaults and dozens of murders. ... What are the world, our conscience, and, in particular, the Lord now rightfully expecting from the church? The calls of a drowning Roma woman were unhesitatingly answered by a brave woman journalist, whose name should not be forgotten. Heroism, both exceptional and so very natural, is the ultimate model of practical implementation of love for fellow man and an appeal for us to open our eyes to a fellow man in distress.”

—Pastoral Letter of Czech and Moravian Bishops on the Roma Problem, March 22, 1998 (the 14 signatories included Bishop Vaclav Maly, a former dissident who was persecuted by the Communists)

Government Response Remains Weak While Roma Frustration Grows

The Klaus government, which governed June 1992—November 1997, was largely indifferent to this growing problem. In September 1993, for example, 16 skinheads drove an 18-year-old Rom, Tibor Danihel, into the river in Pisek and caused him to drown; his assailants were all acquitted. It took two years for a regional prosecutor to renew the charges and then it took another two years (until March 1997) for the trial. In the end, 3 skinheads were convicted—no one on murder charges—receiving sentences of only 31, 31, and 22 months, respectively. (After the Bihariova murder, described above, the Czech Supreme Court decided that these sentences were too lenient after all and that the defendants would have to stand trial again.)

While Czech law enforcement officials struggled (badly) with the Danihel case, another gruesome, high-profile, racially motivated murder occurred. In 1995, skinheads broke into the home of Tibor Berki and, in front of his wife and children, beat him to death with truncheons. After this attack, Prime Minister Klaus finally conceded there was a problem and that the punishment for racially motivated crimes should be increased. Somebody ought to be doing something about this, he seemed to suggest.

In August 1997, the magnitude of the problems faced by Czech

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Roma were catapulted onto front pages when more than 1,000 Roma fled the Czech Republic *en masse* to Canada and requested asylum (leading Canada to reimpose visa restrictions on Czechs); a smaller wave to the United Kingdom followed shortly thereafter. Although most of these cases are still pending review, reportedly several dozen individual applicants have been found, either by the Canadian or U.K. Government, to have a well-founded fear of persecution within the meaning of the U.N. Convention on Refugees. In March, Roma representatives issued an appeal stating that large numbers of Roma intend to seek refuge in the United States.

"A small incident could blow up into a bigger conflict." "Roma cannot be appeased any more by declarations." "There is an absolute lack of trust among Roma now; they don't trust the government, the courts, or the institutions." "The level of frustration [with the skinheads] is going up—people feel they don't have anything to lose and that the situation can't get worse." "Roma leaders are caught between a rock and a hard place—they are unelected and represent only their own consciences, but they can't deliver anything [for their people]. I warned a Czech official recently—there will be riots." "We have negotiated with this government for eight years without result. We can leave...or we can take justice into our own hands." "The question before us is this: do we follow the path of Martin Luther King—or Malcolm X?"

—The words of Roma in the Czech Republic, March 1998

The embarrassment generated by these claims helped to bolster the efforts of a small number of people within the Czech Government who have been trying to address the concerns of Roma. Last Fall, after the Canadian debacle, Minister without Portfolio Pavel Bratinka issued a weighty report on the situation of the Roma in the Czech Republic; in November, an Inter-Ministerial Commission for Romani Affairs was formed.

These are well-intended and important steps that may lead, over the long run, to improvements for the Romani community. At the same time, however, they fail to adequately address the most urgent problem facing the Roma: ensuring their physical safety. On the contrary, Czech Interior Minister Cyril Svoboda recently downplayed the significance of racially motivated crime

in his country, stating in March that such crime is not destabilizing, that existing Czech legislation is adequate to address the problem, and that non-governmental organizations are to blame for creating the impression abroad that racism is a problem in the Czech Republic.

With the Czech Government failing to credibly communicate that racially motivated violence will be punished severely, it is not surprising that such attacks have continued in recent months. Significantly, the February 15 murder of Helena Bihariova was reportedly followed by at least six separate assaults by Roma against ethnic Czechs. On March 19, for example, a group of Roma attacked two men who had shouted racial slurs at them in Usti and Labem. (Romani demonstrators also called for Helena Bihariova's murderers to be put to death, although the Czech Republic doesn't have the death penalty.) These sorts of events suggest that the Romani community's patience is wearing thin due to the escalating racially motivated violence against them. While the prospect of a larger conflict between Roma and ethnic Czechs should not be exaggerated, neither should it be discounted.

How Do the Czechs Measure Up?

Several yardsticks can be used to compare the situation of the Roma in the Czech Republic with the situation in neighboring countries. By one particular measure—the number of deaths—the situation in the Czech Republic is worse than in other countries in the region. Simply put, Roma are more at risk of being the victims of racially motivated murder in the Czech Republic than in other nearby countries. (This conclusion is based on a review of the State Department country reports on all Central and Eastern European countries for the past several years; extensive NGO literature; and interviews with NGO and Roma representatives from all of the Central European countries.)

In 1997, the Czech Republic produced 1,216 formal applicants for asylum and was second in a list of Canada's "ten top refugee producing countries," coming between Sri Lanka, with 2,665 refugee applicants, and Iran, with 1,210 applicants.

(Source: Centre for Refugee Studies, Ontario, Canada based on inland refugee claims received by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board)

With respect to other Romani concerns (such as discrimination in employment, housing, public establishments, and schooling), the performance of the Czech Republic in protecting its Romani minority is typical of other governments in the region, with two notable exceptions. First, there seems to be a perception that relations between Roma and other ethnic groups in Macedonia have achieved a degree of normalcy, reflected in parliamentary representation of Roma, television broadcasting in Romani, and lower level education in the Romani language. Second, the Hungarian Government has undertaken a number of concrete initiatives designed to address the concerns of minorities in general and of Roma in particular. These include the establishment of a parliamentary ombudsman for minority issues, the development of local self-government for minority communities, and the establishment of a Roma Press Center designed to counter inaccurate (and inflammatory) reporting on Romani issues. Recent Czech Government initiatives, while welcome, still lag behind the efforts of these two other OSCE states.

For more information about the Romani civil rights issues, see the website for the European Roma Rights Center at <www.errc.com/>. □

"I am convinced that the protection of the most fundamental rights of Roma must be respected by [OSCE] participating States before other social and economic problems can be addressed. If Roma die under suspicious circumstances while in the custody of police, if they are killed by their neighbors, if they are driven from their homes by hate crimes, if they are stripped of their citizenship and then denied the most basic rights of political participation, then programs for improving their literacy or increasing unemployment will have few chances for success."

—Ambassador Norman Anderson, U.S. Delegation to the 1994 Seminar on Roma Issues

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Commissioner on National Minorities. Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Imanaliev asked for more OSCE involvement to strengthen his country's democratic institutions and to help with preparation of a new electoral law. He complimented the work of HCNM van der Stoep and stressed the importance of more economic programs.

A reinforced Permanent Council took place on March 27 in accordance with the decisions taken at the Copenhagen Ministerial meeting in late December. The PC decided to hold the next OSCE summit in "summer-autumn" of 1999, and the next Ministerial in Oslo in December 1998. This decision breaks the current cycle of holding summits every two years. In addition, the PC structured its future work on the Security Model. □



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tions on the western bank of the Dniester River were stopped by secessionist authorities, thus greatly reducing the opportunities for persons on the eastern bank to exercise the franchise.

Another Helsinki Commission monitor who observed the voting and vote count in southern Moldova reported generally acceptable conduct but with some procedural shortcomings which create the potential for abuse. Much of the mood of the electorate reflected dissatisfaction with the state of the economy and with the performance of the national government.

After extended negotiations among the three centrist and center-right parties which won the majority of seats in Parliament, a broad coalition was formed which excluded the Communist Party. It remains to be seen how these three parties and their leaders will be able to work with the government of President Luchinschi. □

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